



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***EFFECTS OF EXTENSIVE READING CIRCLES ON LOWER
PROFICIENCY TERTIARY LEVEL ESL LEARNERS' ORAL
COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE***

ALIYAH BAHARUDDIN MARJI

FBMK 2016 46



**EFFECTS OF EXTENSIVE READING CIRCLES ON LOWER PROFICIENCY
TERTIARY LEVEL ESL LEARNERS' ORAL COMMUNICATIVE
COMPETENCE**

By

ALIYAH BAHARUDDIN MARJI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy**

February 2016

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of extensive reading circles on ESL learners' oral communicative competence at a local institution of higher learning. The study used a non-equivalent control group pre-test-post-test quasi experimental design. Two intact classes out of seven were identified as subjects of the study. The intact classes consisted of Year 2 students (N=47) enrolled for a course in oral proficiency and they were the subjects of the study over a period of 14 weeks. The intact classes were randomly assigned into the experimental (N=27) and control (N=20) groups.

Data was collected by means of pre-test and post test scores using the following instruments specifically an oral production interview, a language proficiency test and five questionnaires for both the control and experimental group. At the end of the treatment, subjects in the experimental group were observed and scored during the post oral interview and tested on the same proficiency test to determine the effects of extensive reading circles in two conditions.

Subjects were further evaluated on their oral communicative competence using two assessment methods. The quantitative method included an analytical scoring scale as a measurement for evaluating five dimensions of oral competency (comprehensibility, fluency of speech, vocabulary usage, grammar and syntax and pronunciation). The qualitative analysis included class observation using an analytical scale as a measurement for evaluating three dimensions of communicative competence (content, communication skills and English skills) and the assessment of subjects' transcribed data obtained during cooperative discussions. Both methods were used to determine the effects of extensive reading on promoting subjects' critical, analytical and

creative thinking that influenced their oral communicative performance during discussions.

The study revealed that the experimental group had shown more significant results statistically over the control group with medium and large effect sizes. This demonstrates that extensive reading reflects a social activity that can effectively promote communicative language learning. It also demonstrates that employing cooperative learning activities as opposed to solitary language learning allowed learners to apply the knowledge of the language gained through extensive reading in an authentic stress free environment. The findings of the study confirmed the comprehensible input hypothesis theory and the principles underlying extensive reading and cooperative learning for oral communicative competence.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KESAN DARIPADA MEMBACA LUAS BERKUMPULAN (EXTENSIVE
READING CIRCLES) ATAS KECEKAPAN KOMUNIKASI LISAN LEBIH
RENDAH KECEKAPAN PELAJAR ESL**

Oleh

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Matlamat kajian ini ialah untuk melihat kesan daripada membaca meluas berkumpulan ke atas prestasi dan kecekapan berkomunikasi secara lisan di antara pelajar-pelajar dewasa ESL lebih rendah kecekapan di sebuah institusi. Kaedah berbentuk kuasi-eksperimen dengan desain pra-ujian-pasca ujian kumpulan terkawal tidak setara telah dipilih untuk penyelidikan ini. Sampel yang digunakan untuk penyelidikan ini terdiri daripada dua kelas pelajar dari tujuh kelas yang mengambil kursus kemahiran lisan. Mereka adalah pelajar-pelajar Tahun 2 (N=47) dan dipilih untuk berkursus dalam bidang kecekapan berinteraksi secara lisan selama 14 minggu. Kelas-kelas ini dibahagikan secara rawak kepada kumpulan eksperimentasi (N=27) dan kumpulan terkawal tanpa rawatan (N=20).

Pungutan data diperolehi melalui pencapaian markah semasa pra-ujian dan pasca ujian dengan menggunakan berbagai instrumen khusus temu bual pengeluaran lisan, ujian penguasaan lisan dan 5 soal selidik untuk kedua-dua kumpulan terkawal dan kumpulan rawatan. Pada peringkat akhir di hujung program, perhatian ditumpukan kepada peserta-peserta didalam kumpulan rawatan dan diuji tahap kecekapan mereka untuk melihat kesan rawatan tersebut ke atas prestasi berkomunikasi secara lisan dalam dua keadaan.

Peserta-peserta seterusnya diuji kecekapan berkomunikasi secara lisan dengan menggunakan dua cara penilaian. Cara pertama menggunakan skala skor analitikal sebagai pengukuran subjektif untuk menilai 5 dimensi berkomunikasi secara lisan (kefahaman, kepitahan, perbendaharaan kata, nahu serta sebutan yang betul). Cara kedua melibatkan pemerhatian di bilik darjah dengan menggunakan skala skor analitikal sebagai pengukuran subjektif untuk menilai 3 dimensi kecekapan berkomunikasi (isi kandungan, kemahiran berinteraksi dan kemahiran berbahasa Inggeris) dan juga analisis kecekapan berpandukan pada transkrip perbincangan kooperatif antara peserta-peserta. Kedua-dua

cara penilaian digunakan untuk memastikan kesan dari membaca meluas yang dapat mempengaruhi prestasi berkomunikasi dari segi kebolehan menganali, mengkeritik dan berfikiran kreatif serta penyampaian bernas semasa perbincangan kooperatif.

Kajian menunjukkan pencapaian ternyata di kalangan kumpulan eksperimentasi dengan kesan yang meluas dan memuaskan. Ini menunjukkan bahawa aktiviti membaca dengan meluas adalah aktiviti yang amat berkesan sebagai alar berkomunikasi dan juga untuk mempelajari penggunaan bahasa. Ia juga membuktikan bahawa aktiviti belajar berkumpulan adalah lebih berkesan berbanding dengan aktiviti belajar sesuatu bahasa secara bersendirian.



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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 17 February 2016 to conduct the final examination of Aliyah Baharuddin Marji on her thesis entitled "Effects of Extensive Reading Circles on Lower Proficiency Tertiary Level ESL Learners' Oral Communicative Competence" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ER	Extensive Reading
RC	Reading Circles
ERC	Extensive Reading Circles
ESL	English as a Second Language
L2	Second Language
MUET	Malaysian University English Test
TL	Target Language
IV	Independent Variable
DV	Dependent Variable
EG	Experimental Group
CG	Control Group

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Oral language has different purposes and functions in everyday communications. It functions as the primary mode of communicative discourse throughout the world as a transactional language or as an interactional language. Hence, people learn to speak for communication and for socializing. However, achieving oral communicative competence with fluency, competency and accuracy in a second language (L2) specifically, the English language proves to be one of the more difficult language skills to master for many L2 English speakers in developing Asian countries. It greatly depends on learners' amount of exposure to language and print, background experience, parents' level of education and use of L2 at home (Snow, Porche, Tabors, & Harris, 2007; Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006; Hart & Risley, 1995). Likewise, L2 speakers have poor communication skills due to factors such as their educational history, cultural and social background, limited exposure to the English language, and inappropriate or ineffective language instruction to support L2 development (Francis et al., 2006).

Speaking is fundamental to L2 learning. Being competent helps learners to master their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation before they use that knowledge in actual communication (Nunan, 2003; Byrne, 1991; Brumfit, 1984). L2 speakers demonstrate effective communication when they are able to exchange information between people using verbal and non-verbal cues, oral and written modes, production and comprehension processes in a variety of contexts (Chaney, 1998; Jacquelyn, 1990; Bachman, 1990). Their communicative success is measured through their capacity to carry out conversations when they know how and when and what to say and to whom with accuracy, clarity, comprehensibility, coherence, effectiveness and appropriateness (Baker, 2010, 2007; Nunan, 2003; Bartram & Walton, 2002; Gao, 2001; Klee, 1998). However, speaking fluently and accurately is a complex and difficult skill to master and such complexity can prevent learners from having the ability to use a varied language when performing tasks (Hinkel, 2005; Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1989). To overcome this, extensive reading (ER) as a language learning activity can play an important role in addressing the issue of helping poor L2 speakers improve their speaking skills and abilities towards oral communicative competence.

A key aspect of reading is that it provides learners the time to comprehend words, to confirm hypotheses about meanings, to construct meaning or to interpret information appropriately (Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Day & Bamford, 1998). Reading provides the bulk of new language input. It supports learners with print experience, exposure to and awareness of phonemes, grammar, spoken language forms or function words (conjunctions, preposition, tenses or articles), introduces words more frequently in written

texts than in common speech and expands learners' understanding of the world (Nuttal, 2005; McShane, 2005; Green, 2002; Degelder & Morais, 1995; Ellis, 1985).

Degelder and Morais, (1995) states that reading helps transform poor readers into good readers and eventually into good L2 speakers when they improve on their poor speech perception and phonological deficits. Good readers can recognize, examine and understand the meanings of printed characters, words or sentences (Lone, 2011). Reading comprehension promotes the accuracy of information, improves attitudes, beliefs, judgments and actions of readers (Eyre, 2005). Therefore, reading is important for L2 learning when it requires learners to construct meaning from the printed message in order to acquire and create new information (Lone, 2011; Mokatsi, 2005). Krashen (2004, 1993b) supports this and claims that good readers develop good writing styles, improve their language proficiency, expand their vocabulary base and improve their grammar to become excellent spellers and better speakers.

Reading was previously looked upon as an individual solitary activity but it is now considered a social construct containing social elements that reflect social activity (Guthrie, McRae & Klauda, 2007). This would help learners develop their speaking skills and this is important for learners in institutions of higher learning. L2 learners who possess reading competency would have easier access to academic, syntactic and world knowledge (Iwahori, 2008; McShane, 2005). Without oral communicative competence, learners are not able to provide fluent and accurate output which is essential for any oral communicative events. Hence, reading and speaking are both essential skills for Malaysian learners.

1.1 Background to the Study

Malaysian learners became poor L2 speakers when they found that learning English to communicate competently was difficult within an examination-oriented school system that focused on grammar, reading and writing (Koo, 2008; Jalaludin, Mat Awal & Abu Bakar, 2008; Ali & Ismail, 2006; Tunku Mokhtar & Abdullah, 2005; Ambigapathy, 2002; Hassan & Selamat, 2002; Lim, 1994). In other words, language use in language classrooms was not encouraged when the focus was on improving writing skills. It was claimed that this has led to learners being competent structurally but less competent communicatively.

Lower proficiency learners with poor oral communicative competence could improve if they adopt good reading habits. There are many potential sources of English input but much remains incomprehensible to learners with poor reading skills. Similarly, government programs for example, The Class Reader Program (1989) and the Extensive Reading Program (ELRP, 1976) were not

successful in helping learners develop their general language skills, proficiency and reading skills in English (Mat Yatin, Sulaiman, Shuhaimi, Ibrahim, & Murad, 2014). It was also pointed out that about only one third of all national secondary schools participated in the ELRP (Raj & Hunt, 1990). Some other reasons for poor reading habits are learners' poor reading attitude and motivation, and those who come from families with different socioeconomic status and educational background (Majzub, 2010; Zainal, 2005; Ambigapathy, 1997).

The impact of a poor reading habit leads to learners exhibiting poor critical thinking skills and abilities to evaluate academic texts (Muhammad, 2007), demonstrating poor academic writing skills when they possess limited choice of word selection and language variety (Krishnakumari, Paul-Evanson, & Selvanayagam, 2010), displaying poor performance in content subject matters when they apply incorrect grammar and phonological rules (Ismail, 2008) and demonstrating poor reading skills that prevent them from coping with the reading demands of the university (Nambiar, 2007).

There are also other reasons why learners are learning English without speaking the language. First, formal and traditional language classes are teacher-centered with language instructors relying on individual-oriented tasks with worksheets and workbooks with minimal use of authentic reading materials introduced in language classrooms (Singh, 2003). Students' practice or use of the L2 is restricted to parroting similar examples from workbooks without variations in word choice and sentence structure. Students find this approach to language learning uninteresting, monotonous and not meaningful. Therefore, students possess a poor perception of L2 learning, styles and methods and they would generally demonstrate a poor attitude and motivation towards learning and using the language. Observations by Lyall (2014) on schools in Malaysia revealed that language instructors taught reading through choral repetition of reading texts and choral spelling of words. The teachers seldom asked questions or encouraged prediction, self-correction or word attack skills.

Second, exposure to and use of English outside the classroom are almost non-existent (Ting, Mahathir, & Chang, 2009). This indicates that English plays a minor role in the lives of the community and that many L2 speakers learn the target language (TL) formally in classrooms (Schuetze, 2002). This could be due to the limited use of English at home (Ali, 2003). The local dialect is used instead for communicative purposes. Other mediating agents such as classmates, family members, friends, or reading materials also influence L2 learners' attitude and motivation towards learning and the learning process (Gao, 2006).

Third, language instructors or teachers have also adopted the conventional grammar translation method of teaching English with an emphasis on the rote

learning of grammatical skills and vocabulary. Many believe that the translation method is the most effective way to teach English with weak or poor learners (Ali, 2008, 2003; Littlewood, 2007; Nambiar, 2007; Carless, 2006; Rahman, 2005). This indirectly and negatively impacted the quality of learner-teacher interactions and communication in English. As a result, the communicative aspects of language learning have been neglected. Learners' communicative competence has subsequently eroded since literacy is learnt as a set of skills and not as a social practice. This has subsequently affected learners' confidence and increased their anxiety level when using L2 during communication and class presentations (Zhang, 2009, Samuel & Bakar, 2008; Ismail, 2008; Aziz, 2007; Ambigapathy, 2006, 2002; Ali, 2003).

In the oral proficiency classes where the present study was conducted, the researcher observed students being taught the four language skills using a workbook. Only one chapter provided speaking models, with examples of language forms, to demonstrate the use of language functions. It was noted that the instructors faced difficulty to get the students to engage in discussions or to use the L2. Other shortcomings observed were a) the lack of authentic reading materials as input for speaking. Reading was limited to passages in the workbook, b) students spent more time discussing post-reading exercises/assignments instead of reading topics, c) the presence of a teacher-centered learning environment with instructors relying on examples of language forms in the workbook to teach communicative skills; d) students' limited language skills which caused them to parrot the same set of examples provided in the workbook without variations in word choice or sentence structure.

Based on these findings, the present research focuses on ER, which is frequently prescribed as one method to help L2 learners develop their general language skills. More importantly, ER can play an important role in addressing the issue of students' poor communicative competence. This is in contrast to the conventional/traditional language teaching method, where exposure to L2 in classrooms is normally planned, restricted, or artificial. Such learning situations do not involve the use of authentic reading materials or provide the socio-cultural elements of language learning (Rahman, 2005; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983).

There is an ever growing body of literature that recognises the importance of ER. Past studies evolved to support the effects of ER in the language classrooms on listening, reading comprehension, fluency and speed, writing, vocabulary, word recognition and grammar (Janapoulos, 2009, 1986; Powell, 2005; Green, 2005; Horst, 2005; Sheu, 2004; Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, & Gorsuch, 2004). Affective benefits were also reported such as learners' attitude and motivation towards English and reading in English (Takase, 2009a, 2007, 2004, 2003; Yamashita, 2013, 2004). Past research also saw how L2 learners improved their vocabulary and/or grammar, which was acquired incidentally through good reading habits and how learners were prepared for the Test of

English as a Foreign Language when they became autonomous language learners (Mason, 2011; Rodrigo, 2009; Mason, 2006, Scott & Nagy, 2004). Other studies examined how L2 reading improved with a decrease in anxiety (Yamashita, 2013). Likewise, a study by Saleem (2010) demonstrated how ER helped learners improve L2 literacy behaviors and develop their writing and critical thinking skills. A study by Smith (2010) demonstrated that an hour of sustained silent reading every week helped learners improve L2 proficiency and spelling. It was also found that ER helped improve learners reading skills, rate and comprehension (Hitosugi & Day, 2004; Asraf & Ahmad, 2003).

Recently, researchers have shown an increased interest in cooperative learning. Cooperative learning involves peer engagement with social interaction where learners in small groups would have the opportunity to explore common interests and share understanding (Brewer & Burgess, 2005; Daniels, 2002, Vygotsky, 1978). There were studies which used computers or identical collaborative tools to determine its effects on L2 learning and acquisition (Hassan, Fong, & Idrus, 2011). Other studies which also used computers as a medium revealed that self-selected articles or books from computers increased vocabulary size and helped skilled L2 readers improve their motivation and self-confidence (Arnold, 2009; Yamashita, 2004).

The above studies did not however, attempt to measure oral communicative success. Such studies did not also incorporate cooperative learning by employing Reading Circles (RC) into an ER program to investigate if an integrated approach could have a better impact on oral communicative competence. The principles of RC have been applied by researchers in the field of reading which looked at students grouped together to discuss and share their responses and understanding of reading texts during open-ended classroom discourse (Soliman, 2012; Woo & Reeves, 2008; Marzano, Pickering & Pollack, 2001; Willis, 1996). Some other researchers used the term 'literature circles' (Bedel, 2011; Daniels, 2002) and others like Khabiri and Lavasani (2012) used the term 'talking circles' as a pedagogical procedure to improve L2 learners' oral proficiency. As reported by Soliman (2012), he states that there is a lack of studies investigating ER with RC as a pedagogical procedure in language classrooms in relation to L2 oral development. Furthermore, studies in the past on ER mainly looked at its effects on learners' language development without employing RC (Saleem, 2010; Smith, 2010; Shen, 2009; Rodrigo, 2009; Horst, 2005).

In light of recent events, it is becoming extremely difficult to ignore the importance of ER and RC in the field of education and language learning. Hence, the present research is task based and employs ER with RC to investigate if this approach can increase lower proficiency learners' knowledge of language before they feel confident to use the TL. Cooperative learning was introduced by Vygotsky (1978) and he explains that learners would receive comprehensible input through ER during the inter-mental phase followed with RC for L2 output during the intra-mental phase. This allows the researcher to

observe the application of newly acquired knowledge during interaction in a more structured social discourse (Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009; Leki, 2007; Langer, 2002). The researcher will investigate if this approach can help learners develop their speaking skills and abilities towards oral communicative competence. The present study will also look at a cause effect relationship that takes into account mediating factors where past studies had treated ER as a possible cause and other factors as the effects.

The research would investigate the extent of lower proficiency learners' incidental language acquisition thereby providing a shift in reading pedagogy. The treatment would emphasize the importance of acquiring English to achieve intelligibility and comprehensibility during communication as opposed to mastering a native proficiency. The treatment would also encourage learners to socially generate language acquisition and to articulate ideas, opinions and solutions clearly, freely and unselfconsciously in L2 (Lantoff, 2006; Furr, 2004; Doolittle & Hicks, 2003). It is hoped that future learners will then appreciate ER with RC as a social interactive learning activity.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The researcher believes that poor reading habits among Malaysian learners can be one of many reasons why they have poor speaking skills. Poor readers or readers with bad reading habits lack vocabulary that could otherwise assist their speaking performance during communicative discourse. They also lack exposure and knowledge of spelling patterns that could affect their pronunciation and listening. Likewise, they lack knowledge of grammar and spoken language forms such as conjunctions, prepositions and articles that could help learners form intelligent and comprehensible sentences during speaking.

Studies in Malaysia that have looked at reading habits show that reading habits among Malaysians were still poor and that the amount of time spent on reading by learners was similar to what was surveyed in the past (Mat Yatin et al, 2014; Annamalai & Muniandy, 2013; National Union of the Teaching Profession, 2006; Ambigapathy, 1997). Moreover, Annamalai and Muniandy revealed that learners found that reading was difficult causing language anxiety and that reading was boring and not motivating. Other studies also revealed that poor reading habits prevented learners from improving language proficiency, enhancing critical thinking skills and building maturity on day to day issues (Kim & Anderson, 2011; Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). Such habits affected learners' ability to develop mental and intellectual capacity to evaluate academic texts and to comprehend difficult words in long sentences when they possess poor development of vocabulary and L2 knowledge (Muhammad, 2007).

This is perhaps why poor reading habits among Malaysian learners lead to poor oral communicative competence. As professed by Hilferty (2000), there is a reciprocal spiralling effect between reading and speaking. She specifically states that not only do oral skills influence reading but as L2 learners develop reading skills, they would also develop their spoken language. As such, Malaysian learners who desire to improve oral communicative competence would need to read extensively in order to expose themselves to not only content knowledge but also to vocabulary, grammar and lexical syntactical knowledge. These language components, which can be acquired through reading, are important to help them improve their oral communicative competence. As observed by Hill (1997), students found it embarrassing to speak the language before they felt confident to use their lexis and syntax. These students realized that exposure to reading provided them the opportunity to improve their lexical-syntactical knowledge and language processing skills before they were more willing to use the L2.

Promoting oral communicative competence would reflect good classroom practice. Speaking in English is a critical area of language learning and teaching for both L2 learners with low proficiency and language instructors in Malaysia. This would be in contrast to previous language learning methods where grammatical competence was given top priority. However, the teaching of speaking has been undervalued. This evidence lies in students' everyday conversations which often consist of grammatical and phonological errors.

The teaching of oral communicative competence should include the development of language proficiency through authentic social and school environments. It would encourage learners to express themselves and use the language appropriately for any communicative event. Instead, traditional ESL instructors in Malaysia are not promoting L2 use in classrooms when they focus on repetition, drilling of words and sentences and the memorization of dialogues and grammatical patterns when teaching the skill of speaking. The traditional method of teaching oral skills is inadequate to support higher language functions such as analyzing, predicting, explaining and justifying during communicative discourse (Brown, 2004a).

One study that investigated students' perception of language classrooms which realized that the current traditional teaching methods and approaches to L2 learning and teaching are reasons for poor communicative performance among Malaysian learners is that of Hiew (2012). The study has revealed that language instructors should be more creative in their lessons and state that instructors need to include more interactive group assignments and games. Oral language instructors in traditional ESL classrooms do not encourage extensive reading by using authentic reading materials. This was highlighted when students revealed that language instructors rely on textbooks without providing additional input.

Reading was limited to short unauthentic passages while instructors relied on examples of language forms with language functions in workbooks to teach communicative skills. Obtaining different types of authentic reading materials from magazines, newspapers and the internet can increase learners' language interest and broaden their knowledge of the world, the L2 and subject matter. The use of such reading materials could improve learners' attitude and motivation towards the L2 and encourage them to share their newly acquired knowledge to develop and improve oral skills (Takase, 2009a). Additionally, reading allows learners to use their schemata to integrate old knowledge with new knowledge before they are encouraged to analyze and react to the information through language use. Therefore, incorporating authentic reading materials which represents non-academic everyday topics into the syllabus would encourage learners to read more in English.

Although extensive research has been carried out on ER, there has been no detailed investigation of the use of RC to investigate its effects on oral communicative competence. In addition, no research which employed ER with RC has been found that surveyed its effects on oral communication. Hence, it is hoped that this research would encourage lower proficiency learners to use the language socially and interactively. The language learning approach would allow these learners to learn from authentic reading materials and from one another about the use and function of the language in a low threatening learning environment. Employing ER with RC would also improve learners' attitude towards learning the language, motivation to read in English, language proficiency and language anxiety (Yamashita, 2013, 2008; Takase, 2007). Allowing learners to have the choice to improve their oral skills, the control and interest over their learning such as self-selecting their reading topics and the opportunity to work in groups could help improve learners' attitude and motivation towards the reading the language and learning the language (Kelly, 2009; Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, 2004; Weller, 2005).

The impact of ER with RC on oral communicative competence is understudied. In fact, very little attention has been paid to the role of ER on speaking skills. Past studies (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Huang & Van Naerssen, 1987; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983, 1981) which investigated the effects of ER on language skills did not directly study the effects of ER on oral communicative performance. Instead, these studies only documented incidental findings on improved oral competence. While there appears to be almost no studies that investigated the reading-speaking connection, a literature search revealed a dearth of studies by Parodi (2007), Tsang (1996) and Tudor and Hafiz (1989) to name a few who investigated the reading-writing connection. Additionally, numerous studies in the past involving ER lacked control groups (Takase, 2009a; Yamashita, 2008; Iwahori, 2008; Greenberg, Rodrigo, Berry, Brinck, & Joseph, 2006; Horst, 2005; Lai, 1993). As a result, it was difficult to determine whether the effects from treatment using ER could be justified.

There has been no reliable evidence that ER with RC can have an impact on oral communicative competence. This research therefore aims to investigate the effects of ER followed with RC on lower proficiency ESL learners' oral communicative competence. Subjects will be from an institution of higher learning. The research will include an experimental group (EG) and a control group (CG) to determine if the effects of the treatment are justifiable.

1.3 Research Objectives

The primary objective of the research is to investigate the effects of ER with RC on lower proficiency ESL learners' oral communicative competence. The research specifically examines the usefulness of ER followed by RC, subsequently termed as Extensive Reading Circles (ERC), and investigates whether the treatment can improve ESL undergraduate students' oral communicative competence and compares this with a no treatment condition. The secondary objective is to observe if mediating variables specifically, attitude towards English, motivation to read in English, anxiety to use English and L2 proficiency can mediate the effects of ERC on oral communicative competence among these learners.

Therefore, the specific research objectives are to determine:

1. If there is a significant difference in the effects of ERC on lower proficiency ESL learners' oral communicative competence in the pre and post-tests within the EG and CG and between both the groups in terms of comprehensibility, fluency of speech, vocabulary usage, grammar and syntax and pronunciation.
2. If there is a significant difference in the effects of ERC on attitude towards English and motivation to read in the pre and post-tests within the EG and CG and between both the groups.
3. If there is a significant difference in the effects of ERC on language use anxiety level in the pre and post-tests within the EG and CG and between both the groups.
4. If there is a significant difference in the effects of ERC on language proficiency in the pre and post-tests within the EG and CG and between both the groups in terms of reading and comprehension, vocabulary and grammar (verb forms, tenses, prepositions and pronouns)
5. If language attitude, reading motivation, language use anxiety and language proficiency can mediate the effects of ERC on lower proficiency ESL learners' oral communicative competence.

Based on the specific research objectives, the research questions are as follows:

1. Does ERC have a significant effect on lower proficiency ESL learners' oral communicative competence in terms of comprehensibility, fluency of speech, vocabulary usage, grammar and syntax and pronunciation?
2. Does ERC have a significant effect on lower proficiency ESL learners' attitude towards English and on motivation to read?
3. Does ERC have a significant effect on lower proficiency ESL learners' anxiety to use English?
4. Does ERC have a significant effect on lower proficiency ESL learners' language proficiency in terms of reading and comprehension, vocabulary and grammar?
5. Do language attitude, reading motivation, language use anxiety and language proficiency mediate the effects of ERC on lower proficiency ESL learners' oral communicative competence?

Based on the research questions of the study, the null hypotheses of the study are as follows:

- Ho₁:** There is no significant difference in the comprehensibility scores, fluency scores, vocabulary scores, grammar and syntax scores and pronunciation scores within and between the experimental group and the control group in the pre-test and post-test.
- Ho₂:** There is no significant difference in the language learning attitude scores and in the reading motivation scores within and between the experimental group and the control group in the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire.
- Ho₃:** There is no significant difference in the language use anxiety scores within and between the experimental group and the control group in the pre-questionnaire and the post-questionnaire.
- Ho₄:** There is no significant difference in the reading and comprehension scores, vocabulary scores and grammar scores within and between the experimental group and the control group in a pre-test and post-language proficiency test.
- Ho₅:** There is no significant difference in the effects of ERC on ESL oral communicative competence with respect to learners' language learning attitude, reading motivation, language use anxiety and language proficiency.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The present research investigates for the first time the extent of learners' incidental language acquisition through the effects of ERC on ESL learners' oral communicative competence. The research fills a gap in the literature by including RC as a social cultural approach to observe how they would then apply and share their new knowledge during cooperative discussions to develop oral skills towards communicative competence. It was said that learners placed in small groups would have the opportunity to be socially interactive with the immediate learning environment during open-ended classroom discourse (Woo & Reeves, 2008; Marzano, Pickering & Pollack, 2001). Learners would be encouraged to speak confidently in the L2 when interacting with one another. Therefore, this research makes a major contribution to research by demonstrating that ERC is more meaningful and purposeful when learners are given the opportunity to read and speak with each other in the TL.

The focus of ERC is to engage learners in reading self-selected authentic non-academic reading texts to develop their lexicons. The treatment provides learners with the knowledge of language features such as word forms, affixations, parts of speech, collocations, referents and associations, grammatical patterning and global associations with reading topics in order for them to function adequately in various English language contexts. It would also encourage them to apply their existing schemata to acquire new knowledge or to increase existing schemata knowledge in order to participate in communicative events inside and outside the classroom.

ERC would encourage learners to communicate when the language learning environment shifts from a teacher centered approach to a learner oriented approach (Zakaria & Iksan, 2007). The treatment provides learners with an avenue to develop their oral skills, fluency and competency with group members. Learners who actively engage in learning activities through social interactions find that discovering their own solutions and expressing their ideas is pleasurable, fun, satisfying and interesting (Woo & Reeves, 2008; Strokes, 2003). The treatment could also reduce learners' language use anxiety, promote language learning styles, improve automaticity of existing knowledge, increase higher level reasoning, enhance the transfer of learning between situations and improve self-esteem and motivation (Skwire & Wiener, 2005; Ellis, 2003; Covington, 2000; Johnson & Johnson, 1975).

ERC can give learners the opportunity to participate in real-life communication, authentic activities and meaningful tasks that promote oral language use. The treatment allows for the natural interaction between learners where they learn from one another about the complexity and intricacies of the TL that would otherwise be difficult if done individually. The learning and sharing of opinions and ideas is integrated into the learners' mental structure and this can assist

learners in developing the use of higher cognitive language functions such as analyzing, predicting, explaining and justifying during communication (Lysaught, 2007, Oxford, 2003). The main focus is on the process of learning and on directing learners' attention to the process of speaking for oral communicative competence. It replaces the traditional product-oriented and teacher-oriented language classroom where oral language instructors rely heavily on workbooks and language function drills to teach speaking skills. Therefore, this research improves and enhances the present pedagogical teaching of oral classes to generate communication performances.

The findings should make an important contribution to the field of education and language learning. Language instructors from primary level upwards could consider incorporating the ERC approach into the English language curriculum. Incorporating such a program into the English language syllabus will help generally weak learners to develop knowledge of the L2, improve language proficiency and practice using the language for oral communicative competence.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This research investigates the effects of ERC on ESL learners' oral communicative competence at an institution of higher learning. It uses a non-equivalent pre-testpost-test group design which reflects a quasi-experimental pre post design method involving intact groups. In addition, the research observes the degree to which the mediating variables, attitude towards English, motivation to read in English, anxiety to use English and L2 proficiency mediate the effects of ERC on oral communicative competence among ESL learners. The research does not take into consideration age, ethnicity and gender.

The limitations of this research include randomization, sample size and sampling type and time constrain. Below is an explanation of the limitations of the research.

Since this research used an intact group design which is a feature of quasi experimental study, randomization was not possible. Hence, the findings cannot be generalized. The researcher had no control over the selection of the intact classes when the Language Center chose two intact classes out of seven classes to be assigned to the researcher for the study. The researcher was also not allowed to reassign and reorganize students. The oral proficiency classes represented intact groups with students who were readily found and naturally assembled with poor L2 oral communicative competence (Creswell, 2007; Campbell & Stanley, 1966, 1963). The researcher however, used the toss-the- coin method to randomly assigned one intact class to be the EG and another intact class to be the CG for comparison purposes.

Intact groups did not provide the assurance that both groups consisted of students who were equivalent or comparable. Instead, the research presents a homogeneous group of students with poor oral skills from either the EG or the CG. Hence, the quasi-experimental design method did not allow generalization for the general population of L2 learners in Malaysia.

The number of subjects for the research was small (N=43). During the period of the research (February- May), students who registered were the remaining students in Year 2 who had to attend the course before proceeding into Year 3. Further, the Language Center had introduced other language courses for new students. Hence, there were only seven oral proficiency classes with less than thirty registered students for each class.

The duration of the research was another limitation. The research was conducted over 14 weeks since the oral proficiency classes were conducted over one semester. Consequently, the researcher did not have the opportunity to conduct the study over a longer period to observe the long term impact of ERC on students' oral communicative performance and competence. Further, students' oral communicative competence was observed in the classroom. There was no opportunity to investigate their communicative competence with other students outside the classroom.

Therefore, the findings of the research are limited in its generalization and can only be generalized to similar contexts.

1.6 Definition of Terms

The following are the definitions of the terms that are used in the research.

ER is reading extensively self-selected authentic reading materials from any interesting print or written text which will encourage learners to focus on meaning and not the form of the language during interaction (Krashen, 2004; Day & Bamford, 1998, 1997). Hence, ER is defined as a social cultural activity to promote interaction for ESL learners to improve oral communicative competence (Vygotsky, 1978).

RC is a task based post reading activity that reflects cooperative or collaborative learning. It represents small discussion groups. Collaborative or cooperative discussions are guided by what has been read by group members. It represents an authentic atmosphere reflecting an interactive social practice for subjects to help, motivate and support one another towards using and producing a L2 (Soliman, 2012). For this study, RC is defined as a social

cultural activity for subjects to improve oral communicative competence (Vygotsky, 1978).

ER with RC termed as Extensive Reading Circles (ERC) is defined in this research as out of class ER followed with RC to allow subjects to apply L2 interactively and socially during cooperative discussions.

Authentic reading materials are defined as texts not created or edited for pedagogic purposes but written with real language to fulfill a social purpose in the language community (Peacock, 1997; Wallace, 1992). Using authentic reading materials exposes subjects to the world and the language which can heighten their reading pleasure and motivation towards language development (Guariento & Morley 2001). Such materials are found in magazines, newspapers and on the internet.

Oral communicative competence is defined as subjects knowing how sentences are put together to communicate and possessing the ability to interact well with others (Spitzberg, 2000, 1988; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). It demonstrates subjects' mastery of their knowledge of language and the ability to apply the knowledge in actual communicative events (Canale, 1983, Canale & Swain, 1980).

ESL learners are described as subjects in an ESL context who speak a different language and who live in a country where English is the main language spoken (Merriam-Webster, 2014).

TL refers to the English language which is to be acquired through ERC for oral communicative competence.

1.7 Thesis Organization

The overall structure of the research takes the form of five chapters. The research first gives a brief overview of the history of ER and RC. It identifies ERC as a language learning approach to help improve ESL learners' oral communicative competence. The treatment is designed to encourage learners to use their natural language output when they engage in meaningful interactions. The objective is to maintain comprehensibility and on-going communication despite limitations in their communicative competence (Richard, 2007, 2006). Encouraging learners to communicate in English spontaneously, despite the presence of language errors, is the first step towards learning and acquiring general language proficiency (ibid).

Chapter Two begins by laying the theoretical dimensions of the research when it reviews past literature pertaining to ERC. This chapter presents the theoretical framework with Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis as the primary theory for this study. The theory is further supported by other language learning theories to demonstrate the benefits of ERC as the independent variable (IV). The study seeks to investigate if the IV has an effect on learners' oral communicative competence as the dependent variable (DV). The chapter also points out that ESL learners cannot perform either language skill, that is reading and speaking, in the absence of the other.

Chapter Three is concerned with the methodology used for the research. It explains the selection of intact classes using convenience sampling leading to the employment of a quasi-experimental pre post design. The research employed seven different instruments and the chapter describes each instrument. It includes an explanation of how a pilot study was conducted to determine the reliability and validity of instruments before the study was conducted over 14 weeks. The chapter explains how oral interviews were used and conducted before and after treatment and how in-class observations were employed during cooperative discussions using different analytical scoring scales. The chapter also introduces the test specifications for the language proficiency test. The chapter also looked at tests carried out on collected data to determine the effects of the treatment on ESL learners' oral communicative competence.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the research. It is divided into two sections. Section 1 analyses and discusses the results of oral interviews, attitude towards language, motivation to read in English, anxiety to use English, willingness to communicate in English and language proficiency test undertaken before and after treatment for within group and between group differences. The results of factors or agents that can mediate the effects of ERC on ESL learners' oral communicative competence are also revealed and discussed in this section. Section 2 presents the qualitative analysis of the research with respect to subjects' oral performance that reflects their critical thinking skills and abilities during thought processes and the relevant communicative strategies used during cooperative discussions.

Chapter Five presents a summary of major findings, the conclusion for each major finding and relevant recommendations for future studies.

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Marji, A.D.B., Galea, S.R., & Chan, M.Y., (2015). Evaluating the Effects of Extensive Reading Circles on ESL Learners' Oral Communicative Competence, *Malaysian Journals of Languages & Linguistics*, Vol 4 (1).

List of Conferences as Presenter

Interest & Motivation in Language Learning through Extensive Reading with Reading Circles, ILLC Seminar 11-13 November 2013, Penang

Second Language Oral Development through Extensive Reading with Reading Circles, ICELT Conference 18-20 November 2013, Melaka

Library Counter Talk: Communication Encounters between Counter Staff and International Students. The 8th International Language for Specific Purposes (LAP), 4-5 September 2012, Swiss Garden Hotel & Residences, Kuala Lumpur.



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